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THE ISRAELITE VIEW OF PATRIOTISM.

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The fact stated.—Causes.—The purpose of the prophetic office.—The political platform.—The fundamental idea of patriotism.—Its practical applications.—It furnished the strongest incentives for loyalty.—It offers the most exalted ideal.

Love of race and country, as one of the most commendable virtues, was highly cultivated among the children of Israel. Rarely is there found a more intense patriotism than that which finds expression in the 137th Psalm in which the poet swears complete devotion to native land until all his organs may cease their function, and vows unmeasured and mortal hostility to his country's oppressors and enemies. Even the Christianized Saul of Tarsus, liberalized by contact with Greek culture and enjoying the enviable prerogatives of Roman citizenship, could wish that he himself were *anathema* from Christ for his brethren's sake, his kinsmen according to the flesh. The skillful author of the Epistle to the Hebrews knew full well what instances to quote in order to arouse the waning enthusiasm of Jewish converts to something of that ardor which burned in the breast of every descendant of Jacob. What a glowing category of patriots is that which included Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, David, the prophets, the Maccabees and others whose inspiring impulse was the same faith that constitutes the essence of vital Christianity. In all periods of sacred history the most extravagant notions of Israelitish supremacy had been constantly encouraged and entertained, so that exclusiveness and bigotry were not confined to the religious views of the chosen people, but were equally prominent in their international relations.

The seeds of Messianic doctrine concerning the kingdom of God were sown on soil well prepared to germinate and produce

a spirit of unswerving fealty to Christ the Great Head of the Church.

Numerous causes contributed to this state of affairs. A peculiar people are sure to be antagonized and persecuted, and the opposition of others by reflex influence would intensify their own national spirit. Their unique form of religion, thoroughly interwoven with the business of secular and civil life, admitting of no compromise with the idolatries of their neighbors, depended for its maintenance on the cultivation of race patriotism. Their traditions tended to foster and expand the sentiment of attachment to locality which they firmly believed had been indicated by Jehovah himself. The purchase of Machpelah and the burial there of the early ancestry at some inconvenience would have the same effect as the preaching of Peter the Hermit and others for the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens. The centralization of worship at Jerusalem or Bethel appealed to the most invincible of all motives in the struggle to defend or regain the hallowed localities. Tribal ownership of estate which under no circumstances was to be forfeited, except for treason, and depending for its perpetuation on religious fidelity, has fixed for centuries an ineradicable desire to dwell again in the Holy Land. Circumcision, operating to distinguish the people from the heathen and to restrict the numbers of population, set them off as a race and made it absolutely necessary for them to work together.

During the heroic periods of the nation's history, both in the northern and in the southern kingdoms, the office of prophet was distinctively exercised to train the people in the principles of pure patriotism. These holding the divine commission claimed to be lovers of country, and their professed purpose in every effort for reform was the welfare of the body politic. They seemed to conceive no other idea than that the solution of the problem in regard to their own and all the earth's material ills would be found in the establishment of Israelitish rule.

Further, their ideal of the nation was that it existed for the benefit of its citizens and not for its own glorification, and so, if the general government was upheld, the individual would be

happy, and conversely, if each Israelite was loyal the community would be prosperous. In very many cases their message was addressed to the rulers in church or state, largely because, then as in later times, history seemed to be chiefly occupied with the doings of public functionaries rather than with the detail of unconventional life. It is not in the province of this article so much to describe the method of the prophet's endeavor as to show that his office, which has been considered mostly ecclesiastical, was administered on an essentially patriotic basis. The evangelical spirit, in a limited form of course, was unmistakably displayed in many of their utterances, but if the redemption of the whole world, as we understand that work, ever entered their minds, they must have believed that it could be accomplished only by the extension of Hebrew authority. Indeed, the essential feature of Jewish Messianism, which owed so much of its development to prophetism, lay in the fact that the coming son of David was to be a benign ruler to the benefit and honor of all the faithful seed. If the Roman tribune was a defender of civic rights, much more was the Hebrew prophet.

On what platform did this representative of national politics stand? There are in every political party some basal principles which determine or affect its course with reference to current events. Very often it may seem as if the leaders of the organization are mere demagogues striving for victory alone without regard to sentiment, but it is not so with the mass of the people, who are led by intuitive preferences to identify themselves with one or another party because of certain general ideas which are sure to find expression in some form or other. Now and then the independent citizen may break off from those with whom he has been wont to train, but the majority of voters will ultimately array themselves, irrespective of minor details, with those who more nearly reflect the image of their political faith. Even the affairs of only temporal or local interest will take their coloring from the germinal thought. Jehovah's people were sharply divided into opposing factions, as is especially made apparent in the writings of Jeremiah. The prophets were known as leaders, and they were distinguished as true and false.

The term "false" was indeed a very harsh epithet to apply to a fellow-citizen; but it was no more severe than that which an extreme partisan of today will sometimes apply to his antagonist at the ballot-box. So sure is he that his own theory of government is correct and vital to public prosperity that he is tempted to regard the one who dissents as basely misguided and disloyal. Those who have contended for an issue which has been first defeated and afterwards has been proven to be such that, if it had been successful, it would have resulted in disaster and ruin, have sometimes been called traitorous when they were really nothing worse than blind to their own and their country's good. Among the Hebrews however the term "false" was justifiable because that class attempted to lead the king and his people into the worship of gods which the conscience instinctively denounced as false, and in the constitutional law of the nation such idolatry had been absolutely prohibited as treason against Jehovah, the ruler and savior of the people.

This leads to the statement that national loyalty consisted in faithful and unwavering worship of the true God. The spur to all civil policy was that the divine Judge approved and willed it. The secret of success in all public as well as private affairs was found in keeping the law of the Lord. If the people were defeated in battle, was it not because Jehovah of Sabaoth had refused to lead them, and had he not refused because he was displeased with either their personal or their official conduct? Some one had troubled Israel by violating the sacred ordinances. Religion was at the very foundation of their social organism. The original settlement had been made in obedience to the impulse of conscience, and in all subsequent affairs the children of Abraham had been providentially guided by a personal deity. Vain, therefore, would be any political theory that left Jehovah out of the count.

And here it must be borne in mind that in the period of highest prophetic ecstasy religion consisted in something more than devotion to the forms of worship. Isaiah, in his introductory chapter, unequivocally and emphatically declares that the service of Jehovah means vastly more than ritualistic observances,

which may come to be even an offense. This sublime vision-gazer, so closely related to the throne too, seems to grasp a view of piety as lofty and practical as that of the New Testament James, who furnishes a decisive and accepted definition of pure religion under the gospel. The contemporary Micah also emphasizes the superior importance of individual conduct and disposition in the discharge of loyalty to the national idea. Not thousands of rams and rivers of oil for sacrifice, but integrity, kindness, and faith were the valid conditions for the restoration and continuance of favor. The characteristic feature in the message of Amos was the assertion that the rights of an obscure or uninfluential but worthy citizen were sacred in the sight of the Lord, who would consign to bitter retribution or overthrow any people who disregarded the law of unswerving equity. The stern Samuel, who introduces the prophetic order, gave Saul to understand that by no ceremonial quibble could he absolve himself from the guilt of disobedience, and that, because he had been false to theocratic rule, he was summarily dismissed as an incompetent representative of the true government. Later writers, it must be allowed, made more prominent the necessity of ecclesiastical loyalty; but even if we admit that their ideal of patriotism had deteriorated, it must be remembered that their appeal for a better worship meant for them also a reformation of manners. With a more gorgeous temple and many more imposing sacrifices, worshipers would be constrained to cultivate a more intense love for all the people.

There could be no higher incentive for the administration of justice than that it was demanded by the expressed will of God as well as for the natural interests of those affected. Even in our civilized age it often happens that equity is sparingly and tardily granted to those who are without means or influence. When absolutism in government was rife there would be little hope for an oppressed subject, if there could be no appeal to a higher power than the reigning sovereign. Fortunately the Hebrew tribune of the plebs claimed his commission from the Divine Majesty, and the political doctrine which he professed demanded human rights on pain of forfeiting the only available

hope of the nation in calamity. Enthusiasm of any kind depends very much on leaders. The masses are not greatly interested in abstract principles, but will yell themselves hoarse for him who advocates their cause with ability and zeal. Thus Hebrew patriotism was much inspired because it rested on faith in Jehovah. His was the Eternal Name. Had he not appeared unto the fathers and delivered them in times of direst distress? Was he not equally the defender of their children? Was he not without exception the friend of every legal heir under the holy covenant? So the Psalms could be sung in both the temple and the battle-field with the assurance that, though all others fail, there is One who is invincible in every conflict. There was always one and the same objective point towards which the loyal heart could direct its longings. There was no time when the people were without a policy, for their life and prosperity at every moment was conditioned on devotion to their divine leader.

Such a patriotism was of a very exalted nature. It was liable to be narrow and uncompromising, but it resulted in maintaining the distinctive permanency of the race, and it set before the world the example of a nation whose religion was regarded as a practical and essential feature in its civil polity. The Jews have proven that the highest incentive for pure and beneficent politics is faith in a personal God who always rules in the affairs of men. It may not be desirable for any government to support an established ecclesiastical organization. Doubtless the unseemly attempt to propagate spiritual sentiment by material measures will soon be wholly abandoned, but it is well to consider that no people can long maintain an efficient autonomy without established religion.